

Between Sanatan Sikhs and Khalsa Sikhs

Rebuttal to - Arvind Pal Mandair's article in Sikh Chic March 15, 2014

Between The Frying Pan and The Fire: Walking Past The Western Concept of Religion & The Hindu Notion of Dharma

By Kavneet Singh

"P.S. Words in italics blue are comments by Reviewer on author Arvind"

The title is great 'Between The Frying Pan and The Fire' because that is exactly where Arvind has got himself stuck; and he has no one to blame but himself, yet as you will see his 'act' unfold, it is all part of the 'Hindu style ritual cleansing' of trying to rid his guilt.

ARVIND PAL SINGH MANDAIR

In recent years the notion of "dharma traditions" has emerged at the margins of the Western academy.

This notion seeks to challenge Western representations of Indic traditions, and attempts to present internally complex and inimical indigenous usage of the term - such as "Hindu" dharma, Buddhist dhamma, Jain dharma and Sikh dharam.

The issue that arises, however, is whether 'dharma' does indeed present a coherent alternative to the Western / Abrahamic notion of "religion"?

How should Sikhs respond to such a move which has strongly assimilative overtones even in the space of the North American academy? Can the Sikh definition of dharam maintain its integrity either within the Western concept of religion or the Hindu notion of dharma?

The simple answer to the last question has to be a resounding NO!

In its current form, the idea of the four so-called 'dharma traditions' is not viable as an alternative paradigm or as a cultural universal. This is because the basic definition of dharma propagated by the 'four dharma tradition' model is drawn from the ideology of orthodox Brahminism.

And orthodox Brahminism is grounded in the ideology of eternal Sanskrit and eternal Veda. As I have argued at length in chapter 5 of my book Religion and The Specter of The West, this ideology of Veda, Sanskrit and dharma is part of what I have termed as the "Vedic Economy".

Basically this ideology is deployed by orthodox Hindus to preserve the centrality of the varnaashramadharma - that is the varna (or caste) that is decreed for orthodox Hindus by birth. If a Hindu preserves this varna, s/he is doing the correct duty and living according to dharma.

Hindus also refer to this system as sanatanadharma or eternal tradition.

In Religion and the Specter of the West ("RSW") -- again, in Chapter 5 -- I argued that this core Hindu system pretends to be liberating and infinitely tolerant but it is really a cover for a very insidious and ancient power structure that facilitates the preservation of Brahmanic social order and ritual purity. I have likened it to an internal colonialism that was resuscitated in the 19th century with the help of European orientalist who unwittingly gave it a status which it had lost under centuries of Islamic rule.

In the modern period Hindu apologists used it to create a powerful stereotype about India and Indian nationalism vis-a-vis- the West – the thoroughly bankrupt and misleading stereotype of Indian civilization as based primarily on Hinduism, and of Hinduism as a non-violent religion.

Such an idea was then used as a ploy for subsuming the diversity of Indian cultures under a hierarchical principle that also constitutes a boundary of 'Indian' civilization (RSW, p. 39).

For those of you who have never read Arvind's book 'Religion and the Specter of the West' it will be a scary eye-opener. I read it over two years ago and alerted others about it. Here is a comment made by Ravinder Singh Taneja which might help, 'I started reading Dr Arvind Pal Singh's book a while ago but struggled with it and then put it aside in frustration. The language I thought was beyond me (and I fancy myself quite comfortable with English)'. This is one of the reasons most Sikhs do not read these books as the reading is purposely made so academically obtuse that you need a doctorate in English to understand and comprehend the content. Notwithstanding the readability factor, the real issue is the content and reasoning behind it. I urge everyone to read the book thoroughly.

A highly articulate and educated Amritdhari lady was introduced to Arvind at a wedding in Cleveland on March 22, 2014. She immediately started asking him candid questions about his above mentioned book and the recent critique by Dr.Gurdarshan Singh to which he got very defensive. He told her that, Dr.Jasbir Singh and others associated with the SGGSF have an agenda, to go after him and are all 'goondas'. When probed further for his venomous response and the reason, he was at loss to explain his allegations and backed off. So my guess is, this Sikh lady will also be lumped in the new 'EMG' (extremely marginal group), 'religious police' and/or better still a 'goonda' according to Arvind's definition.

However, that myth of a non-violent Hinduism was violently exploded in the last few decades with the rise of Hindutva and its pogroms against Sikhs, Muslims, and Dalits, the stigmatization of Christians in India, as well as its strong opposition to other minorities.

Here's what I wrote about this issue in Religion and the Specter of the West (pp 351-352):

Historically speaking, the continuity (sanātanta) of dharmic boundary has been maintained through the rigorous institution of caste denominations (varnādharmā) so that the boundary of those privileged with correct birth / dharma cannot pollute the dharma of those privileged with the eternal sound. Proximity

to the original sound echoed by proximity to one's type or kind (determined largely by distance from or proximity to the exemplary caste) not only minimizes any leakage to the outside, but prevents the outside leaking in. These concepts help to underpin a typically Indian "xenology" that reflects a Brahminical world view:

The Indocentrism developed in "orthodox" Hindu thought transcends by far what is ordinarily called "ethnocentrism". It is not simply an unquestioned perspective or bias, but a sophisticated theoretical structure of self-universalization and self-isolation. Seen from within this complex, highly differentiated structure, the mlecchas are nothing but a faint and distant phenomenon at the horizon of indigenous tradition. They do not possess an "otherness" against which one's own identity could be asserted or in which it could be reflected.

It is difficult to deny the essential continuity even of seemingly secular neo-nationalist Indian scholars with the central themes of Vedic tradition, and specifically with the grammarians Paṇini, Patañjali and Bhartṛhari. The notion of universal language as a single eternal sound testifies to this.

Given that this is so, the underlying intention behind this philosophy of language and art is not difficult to spot. It is to demonstrate that which is proper to Indian civilization, namely Vedic orality, is universal and at the same time analogous to universals in the Greek or Western tradition.

Parallel to this eternal property (sanātana dharma) is the community which has continued to uphold and imbibe it.

This eternal property sanātana dharma (= Eternal Veda = Eternal Sanskrit) has engendered a specific type of community which finds its modern variant in the secular and religious forms of Indian nationalism. It is the continued will to preserve this economy and its revitalization, ironically, through the textualization of the nationalist imaginary initially via Indological and Theosophical literature that has resulted in the identification of sanātana dharma as the "Universal Religion" of India.

It is this very universal that has been routinely deployed by secular and religious Hindu nationalists to try and subvert the Western distinction between secularism and religion.

Hinduism, they argue, is not like other religions in the sense that it is eternal and therefore 'universal'. As universal, it corresponds to 'religion-in-general'. And because it is universal, it is also the basis for the notion of the secular, specifically an Indian or Hindu secularism.

Within this universal frame, cultural formations that resist this universal, for example, Sikhism will be defined as nothing more than a variant of the secular Hindu universal which is also the definition of 'religion-in-general'.

In recent years, some Hindu scholars have propagated a softer version of the old Brahmanic ideology in the guise of the "Four Dharma" traditions, putting Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism on the same list.

The idea that these scholars propagate is that the meaning of dharma in all four of these traditions is the same, hence they can all be traced to the same source, and this same source is the sanatanadharama or the eternal dharma - which is of course a purely Brahmanic ideology.

The reason why they want to connect all four of these traditions is fairly obvious. They want to show that there is a civilizational unity in the form of Hindu-ness behind all properly indigenous traditions of India. However, this unity not only excludes Islam, Judaism and Christianity, which have also laid down roots in India over many centuries, it also reduces Sikh, Buddhist and Jainism to the status of mere puppets of Brahmanic ideology.

But clearly, the meaning of dharma in Buddhism and Sikhi is very different from the Brahmanic meaning. Indeed, one could say that it is completely opposed to it.

In fact Sikh dharam and Buddhist dhamma completely contradict and displace the Brahmanical worldview. They produce their own universals. As I have strongly argued in more than one book (but especially in *Religion and the Specter of the West*), the teaching of the Sikh Gurus gives rise to distinctly Sikh universals. There are many concepts and terms that can act as universals, but the most important ones, as I see them, are the notion of shabad-guru (which is directly related to the question of sovereign authority in Sikhi) and the notion of oneness or ek.

These universals not only give Sikhi its distinct flavor, they also allow it to translate into different cultural contexts and retain its difference in new contexts, languages and environments.

Arvind has articulated his argument very well and no one has any issue with all the above statements he has made so far. The issue is that his interactions in academia, his cavorting with right wing Hindu scholars and his books seem to say something very different; and therein lies the crux of the problem.

Having said all of this, however, an important question now arises. Should Sikh scholars respond to this?

If so, how best to do this? Should Sikh scholars avoid talking to these particular Hindu scholars, avoid any contact with them on intellectual forums?

This is exactly the kind of response which can be heard chanted, almost hysterically, by an extremely marginal group of Sikhs who pretend to speak on behalf of the entire Sikh community.

Why doesn't Arvind come out in the open and state who is this 'extremely marginal group', which according to him is 'speaking on behalf of the entire Sikh community and is almost hysterical'. So this 'extremely marginal group' (EMG) again according to Arvind are nobodies. If that is the case why has he even written this piece? The fact is that he has nowhere to hide from his academic shenanigans so he comes out with this half-baked white wash of an article to clear himself of all the guilt and cover himself with a fig leaf.

Let me first answer the second question (i.e., of not responding, or of avoiding contact with some particular Hindu scholars).

To be honest I think that the suggestion of avoiding contact with Hindus in general, or for that matter, any other religious group, is not only ridiculous, it is impractical. To stop contact in this way, just because we may disagree ideologically, is intellectual cowardice and utterly hypocritical on the part of those who suggest it.

And it is impractical because most Sikh scholars, whether in Punjab or in the West, work with Hindu colleagues, mostly in a spirit of professional collegiality, if not necessarily in ideological agreement.

Some people (especially who pretend to be the 'religious police' but in fact are nothing more than goondas looking for attention) suggest that we create a "Hindu-proof" bunkers and shout against the 'enemy' at the top of our voices.

These bunkers are usually controlled by the bigots who have appointed themselves 'voices of the community' even though they represent a miniscule and fringe group. Within the security of these bunkers, they can cause some unsuspecting Sikhs to get emotionally excited and angry. But outside these bunkers, mercifully, they have no audience.

The 'religious police' Arvind is alluding to is the same 'extremely marginal group' (EMG) he stated earlier, which I would call an 'extremely moderate group'. If the EMG were the real religious police and worse still 'goondas' there would be no written or verbal dialog except the use of the 'desi chitter'. It is highly insulting to all self-respecting Sikhs and a travesty to common sense that an academic of Arvind's stature would stoop so low to call Sikhs scholars who have presented authentic Sikh traditional perspective with academic evidence – goondas. Arvind needs to understand what the word 'goondas' actually means before he uses and throws it around so caustically. Even Dr. McLeod was more honest than Arvind as at least he acknowledged the academic work of this group in his biography. Scholars like Arvind sit within university glass houses/bunkers, disconnected with the community and are busy biting the hands who feed them.

Recently I was asked to give a keynote speech at a conference at a Canadian university on the topic of Religion, Nation and Popular Practice in South Asia. One of the panels at this conference was devoted to a seminar around my book Religion and the Specter of the West. Indeed, the precise purpose of the invitation was to bring me to that particular campus to discuss my book.

The organizing committee behind this conference was comprised of a group of non-Brahmanic Saivite/Tamil scholars who found my arguments against the dominance of 'Vedic Economy' to be useful for their own purposes. Should I have said: "No, thank you! The bigots amongst will get angry if I talk to Hindus"?

Arvind very cleverly is trying to take the conversation off tangent. I have been invited as a keynote speaker to a similar seminar held by South Indian mostly non-Brahman scholars not too long ago. No one has an issue with any such conferences at all. The issue at hand is - when an organization not only has a written stand on a (Sikh) Faith which is not theirs to begin with, but is also inimical to the fundamental postulates of that (Sikh) Faith, then an academic who happens to be a practicing Sikh (I hope) should have the decency to be proactively cautious and have the guts to correct the error of the (Hindu Dharmic

organizations) host as a basic premise before starting any intellectual discourse as a minimum. Not doing this is the height of intellectual and academic dishonesty. If you cannot, then you have no business participating in such an endeavor by crying foul if someone else like the EMG pointed it out to you.

It doesn't make sense!

So, if it is clear that we cannot simply tar all Hindus with the same brush, then we must learn how to discern between various groups. The key question then becomes how to do this? How to draw a line between those particular Hindus or organizations that are part of the same assimilative [sanatanadharma] agenda and those that reject it?

This leads me back to the very first question: should Sikhs respond and if so, how? The answer is simple.

Yes, there has to be a response – but of what kind? Should it come through a normative pre-figurative judgment or through practical engagement?

Sikhs need to be able to state their legitimate differences – irrespective of whether they are cultural, political, intellectual or whatever – in all kinds of different forums, even if some of these forums happen to be dominated by Hindu intellectuals, others by secular atheists, and still others by Christians and Jews, etc., etc. The best form of response is through intellectual debate, dialogue and, where necessary, argument.

Sikhs are a pragmatic community. We can hold steadfast to our convictions, but we don't just stop talking, or stop others from talking to outsiders just because a few fanatics are trying to push us all into a corner, which always results in the political and intellectual marginalization of the community. Sometimes these debates and dialogues have to happen on the turf created and dominated by Hindus.

Let me give a specific example. Since the mid-1990's, the only scholarly forums I engaged in the UK, USA, Canada or Europe, were secular academic forums (such as conferences or workshops dedicated to the study of religion, South Asian studies, cultural studies, philosophy, etc), or the occasional Sikh-sponsored forum such as a community conference.

There is nothing secular about www.danam-web.org , www.taksha.org , www.uberoireligiousstudies.org , www.nalandaconfluence.org , www.infinityfoundation.com as these are all run by right wing, overwhelmingly upper caste, north/west Indian Hindus. Arvind is an intelligent man with not one but two PhDs. Would it not behoove him to check out the scholars he would be cavorting with in advance before he spends a few years working very closely with them and then claiming to leave them on his own – which is a prevarication. Note: Most of the Hindu members (and many are the same people) work closely with all the above organizations and Arvind cannot be so naïve.

Then in 2011, out of the blue, I was invited to lecture on Sikhism at a meeting organized by D.A.N.A.M. or the Dharma Academy of North America. I had never heard of DANAM until approached by its organizer Dr. Rita Sherma. So I did a little bit of digging and found out that this was a group of scholars drawn from Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh studies who had been meeting since 2002 at the American Academy of Religion meetings. I found out from their website that one of their operative concepts was

the notion of dharma as an Indic cultural universal that applied to the four traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, and that they felt marginalized by the very secular stance of scholarly groups such as RiSA (Religion in South Asia) which had long dominated the intellectual space for discussing South Asian traditions in the American Academy of Religion.

Arvind makes deliberate misstatements several times: His association with Uberoi and Danam has occurred much earlier;

- *Orlando, Florida, paper on "Sikhism and Karma", Uberoi Foundation Meeting, October 31st - 2nd Nov, 2009*

<http://arvindmandair.com/speaking-engagements/> (the above paper is proof that he was involved since 2009)

Arvind prevaricates again, as he had worked with DANAM and Uberoi Foundation in 2010.

Uberoi Foundation Experts Meeting 2010

Denver, Colorado

October 8-10, 2010



Arvind and Balbinder standing (top right) with many right wing Hindu academics at the October 8-10, 2010 at the Uberoi Foundation Conference

At the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado: Participants in the 2010

Experts' Meeting of the Uberoi Foundation for Religious Studies, October 9, 2010.

(Below is a short list of all the Brahmin and upper caste Hindus involved in Uberoi and other Orgs. Who consider and want to promote the idea within North American scholarship that Sikhism is a minority dharmic tradition without giving any reference from primary source of Sikh studies Sri guru Granth sahib)

Professor Ved P. Nanda

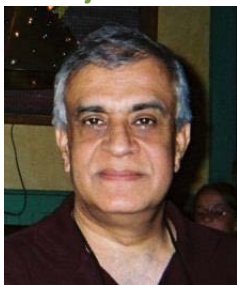
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Professor Ved P. Nanda is the current head of the Hindu Swaymsewak Sangh (HSS) www.hssus.org in the US, which is direct arm of the extremist Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) www.rss.org . He is John Evans University Professor and Thompson G. Marsh Professor of Law at the Sturm College of Law, University of Denver and serves as Director of the International Legal Studies Program there. In 2006 Professor Nanda was honored with the founding of the Nanda Center for International Law. He was also Vice Provost at the University of Denver from 1994-2008, and since 2007 he has served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Iliff School of Theology, Denver. He holds or has held numerous official posts in international, regional, and national professional and civil society organizations.

Among numerous national and international awards, he has received the World Jurist Association's Highest Order of Justice and its World Legal Scholar Award, the Gandhi-King-Ikeda Award for Peace-Building from Soka Gakkai International and Morehouse College, the Human Rights Award from the United Nations Association, and Civil Rights Award from B'nai B'rith. He has received honorary doctorates from Soka University in Tokyo, Japan and from Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, India. He is widely published, having authored or co-authored 23 books in various fields of international law and over 180 chapters and major law review articles. He is a frequent guest on television and radio and writes regularly on international issues for the Denver Post.

Mr. Rajiv Malhotra



Mr. Rajiv Malhotra is right wing ideologue who funds books and research which is entirely Brahmanic centered. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey and is the founder and president of Infinity Foundation. An Indian-American entrepreneur, philanthropist and community leader, he has devoted himself, for the last ten years, to clarifying the many misperceptions about Indic traditions in America and amongst Indians. He is an active writer, columnist, and speaker on a variety of topics, including the traditions and cultures of India, the Indian Diaspora, globalization, and East-West relations. Mr. Malhotra has been appointed to the Asian-American Commission for the State of New Jersey, where he serves as the Chairman for the Education Committee, which was created to start an Asian Studies program in schools. He also serves on the Advisory Board of the New Jersey Chapter of the American Red Cross and has volunteered in local hospice and AIDS counseling. He also chairs the Board of Governors of The Center for Indic Studies.

Arvind Sharma, Ph.D.



Dr. Arvind Sharma is right wing ideologue who writes books (Hinduism as a Missionary Religion) funded by Rajiv Malhotra. He is the Birks Professor of Comparative Religion in the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal Canada, where he teaches courses in World Religions and Indian religions. He has also published extensively in these areas. His latest book, of which he is the contributing editor, is entitled: *Why I Am A Believer* (Penguin India, 2009). Dr. Sharma is currently engaged in promoting the adoption of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions.

Shrinivas Tilak, Ph.D.



Dr. Shrinivas Tilak is an independent researcher based in Montreal. Holder of PhD in history of religions from McGill University, Montreal, Dr Tilak's publications include (1) The Myth of Sarvodaya: Study in Vinoba's Concept (Breakthrough Publications, New Delhi, 1985); (2) Religion and aging in the tradition of India (State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1989); (3) Understanding karma in light of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology and hermeneutics (International Centre for Cultural Studies, Nagpur; 2006), and Reawakening to a secular Hindu nation: M.S. Golwalkar's vision of a dharmaśāpekṣa Hindurashtra (BookSurge, Charleston, SC, 2009). He has also written several chapters for books in the field of Indology edited by distinguished scholars.

Bal Ram Singh, Ph.D.



Dr. Bal Ram Singh is the Director of Center for Indic Studies at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, where he teaches a course on Science of Kriyayoga. As a Professor of Biophysical Chemistry and Henry Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and the Director of Botulinum Research Center, he has been conducting research for 19 years at UMass Dartmouth on the molecular mode of action of botulinum and tetanus neurotoxins, and lately also on yoga, mind, and consciousness. He has been teaching a graduate course on Chemistry of Mind for the past nine years. His research on biodefense and biotechnology is internationally recognized, and he has served on many national and international scientific panels. Dr. Singh has published about 175 research articles, has edited three books, and has obtained three patents. He is the Editor of The Botulinum Journal. Dr. Singh received his B. Sc. from Avadh University in India in 1977 in Biology and Chemistry. He received his M.Sc. and M. Phil. Degrees from Jawaharlal Nehru University, India in Life Sciences during 1979-1982, and his Ph.D. in Chemistry from Texas Tech University in 1987. He completed his post-doctoral training at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1990 and joined the faculty at UMass Dartmouth the same year. He received the First Scholar of the Year Award at UMass Dartmouth in 1996 and the 2004 University Service Award given by the UMass Dartmouth Alumni Association. He is President of BBTech, Inc., Dartmouth, and Managing Director of BBTech Herbal in India. He is also manager of a girls school, Kuruom Vidyalaya, which he has established in his native village in India.

Manohar Shinde, M.D., Ph.D.



Dr. Manohar Shinde studied medicine in Hyderabad, India, where he did General Psychiatry and Child Psychiatry and completed his Ph.D. in Psychoanalysis in 1989. He has served on the clinical faculties at

UCLA and USC Schools of Medicine and at the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis (ICS) in Los Angeles, and has also served as Medical Director at various institutions and has been in private practice in L.A. since 1984. His specialization is in Eating Disorders.

Aside from his professional/medical career, Dr. Shinde has a deep interest in Spirituality, mysticism, Hindu/Vedic Philosophy, History and Contemporary Civilizational concerns. He pursues an active collaboration with many like-minded institutions, through such commitments as sitting on the board of The Foundation for Indic Studies at Clairmont University, Los Angeles, CA, closely supporting the activities of Infinity Foundation, Princeton, N.J., the Indic Foundation at the University of S. Massachusetts at Dartmouth, and the annual conference series of The Human Empowerment Conference. Dr. Shinde is part of an adhoc committee to explore starting of a Vedic University in Los Angeles and is a founding member of The Global Foundation for Civilizational Harmony (GFCH), a forum to facilitate inter-civilizational dialogue as a conflict resolution model. He is also actively involved in several socio-cultural institutions.

Rita D. Sherma, Ph.D.



Dr. Rita Sherma holds a Masters in Religion and a Ph.D. in Theology and Ethics from Claremont Graduate University. She is the co-founder of: the Institute for Indic Philosophy and Culture at Claremont Graduate University; the Hinduism Program Unit at the American Academy of Religion, and the Dharma Academy of North America (DANAM). She is also the founding director of the Institute for Theology Beyond Boundaries. She is visiting professor at Binghamton University, and executive director of the School of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Taksha University. Dr. Sherma has written numerous academic essays, book chapters, and articles in the field of religious studies. She is the co-editor of six volumes on aspects of the indigenous religious systems of India (Dharma Traditions), including Woman and Goddess in Hinduism. Her forthcoming book is Eros, Ecology, and Enlightenment: An Eco-theology of Shakti.

Yashwant Pathak, Ph.D.



Dr. Yashwant Pathak completed his education (M.S., Ph.D. in Pharmaceutical Technology) from Nagpur University, India. He is Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Chairman and Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the College of Pharmacy, Sullivan University, Louisville, Kentucky. With extensive experience

in academia as well as industry, he has to his credit more than 100 publications, including a book in his professional field and several book chapters.

Veena Talwar Oldenburg



Veena Talwar Oldenburg is Professor of History, Baruch College & The Graduate Center of the City University of New York and very recently a Fellow at Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Advanced Study. She has received many prestigious fellowships before this one--from Rockefeller Foundation, American Philosophical society, New York's Social Science Research Council and the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Smithsonian Institution and the National Endowment for the arts in the U.S. All her research interrogates the structures and functioning of colonial India, and its impact and response of indigenous in both urban and rural settings. Apart from her book, Dowry Murder, which will be republished by Penguin in October, she is also the author of the now classic work on colonial urbanization, The Making of Colonial Lucknow (published by Princeton, 1984 and in the Oxford Lucknow Omnibus, 2001), and editor of Shaam-e-Awadh: Writings on Lucknow (Penguin, 2007). She has also published many scholarly articles and essays on women and colonialism.

Shiva Bajpai, Ph.D.



Dr. Shiva G. Bajpai served as Professor of History and Director of Asian Studies at California State University, Northridge, Los Angeles from 1970 to 2003. As a Professor Emeritus, he still continues to teach courses in Indian history and culture at that institution. He has been involved in teaching and research for the last 50 years. He received his B.A. (1955) and M.A. (1957) degrees from the Banaras Hindu University (M.A. Thesis on The Chinese Buddhist Pilgrim Hsuan Tsang/Xuan Zong's India 629-644) and obtained his Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, U.K. in 1967. He served as a tenured Professor of History at the Banaras Hindu University (1958-68) and was

invited by the University of Minnesota to work on A Historical Atlas of South Asia Project (1967-76), with its publication (1978, 2005).

B.N. Narahari Achar, Ph.D.



Dr. B. N. Narahari Achar, originally from Bangalore, is currently a Professor of Physics at the University of Memphis. He earned his Ph D degree from the Pennsylvania State University, specializing in theoretical solid state physics. He taught at the Pennsylvania State University and Bucknell University before joining the University of Memphis. He held positions at the Argonne National Laboratory and at the NASA Glen Research Center. He has authored more than a hundred research papers in his specialty. His interest in the astronomy of ancient India was sparked when he was asked to teach a course in Astronomy for non-science majors at the University of Memphis. He pioneered in the use of Planetarium software in the study of astronomy of ancient India. His research has shown that major revisions have to be made in the accounts currently available of the history of astronomy in ancient India. One of his contributions concerns the date of the Mahabharata war, which he has shown to be a unique date based on the astronomical references in the epic.

Mr. Abhinav Dwivedi



Abhinav Dwivedi was a founder and is currently Vice President and a Board member of Hindu University of America, based in Orlando, Florida. HUA is established to promote learning, research and understanding of Hindu culture, philosophies and religions, traditions, arts and sciences at the graduate level. Mr. Dwivedi is originally from the State of Gujarat, India. Professionally, he has spent over 30 years in the computer industry in the USA. In his last position he was the head of a Motorola Division in India. He holds two Masters Degrees in Engineering and Computer Science, one from IIT (Bombay, India) and another from the University of California at Berkeley. He has taken early retirement from his professional

work to devote full time to his passion -- education. He is actively engaged in growth and management of Hindu University of America. He routinely goes out to speak to colleges, schools, church and temples and corporations on topics ranging from various aspects of Hinduism, culture, and India in general. He currently lives in Orlando, Florida with his family.

Arvind-Pal Mandair, Ph.D.



Arvind Mandair completed B.Sc. and Ph.D (1989) in Chemistry and worked for several multinationals as a research scientist. He has taught in the Physics Department at the University of Warwick, UK. In the mid-90's he changed his academic field to study religion and philosophy and completed an MA, followed by a Ph.D in Philosophy (1999) from the University of Warwick, specializing in Sikh Studies. In 2001 Mandair was appointed Assistant Professor of Religion and named first holder of the S.K.K. Bindra Chair in Sikh studies at Hofstra University, New York. He later moved to the University of Michigan to become the inaugural holder of the S.B.S.C. Chair in Sikh Studies.

Mandair is founding co-editor of the journal Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture and Theory. He currently serves as Assistant Editor of the journal Culture and Religion and on the editorial board of the journal Religions of South Asia. He has published extensively books, journal articles, and book chapters. His 2009 book is entitled Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality and the Politics of Translation, and he has another book, The Politics of Religion-Making forthcoming in 2010. Though grounded in the study of South Asian culture, Mandair's research and teaching interests include areas such as Continental Philosophy; Theory of Religion, Post-colonial Theory; Translation studies and Political theology. In addition he has extensive experience of working with the Sikh

Balbinder Singh Bhogal, Ph.D.



Bhogal is Associate Professor in Religion, Hofstra University, New York City and Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies since September 2007. Previously he has taught in Philosophy and South Asian Religions in the US, Canada, and the UK. He received his Ph.D. in 2001 at the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University, where his thesis was on "Nonduality and Skilful Means in the

Hymns of Guru Nanak: Hermeneutics of the Word.” Bhogal lists as his interests, in addition to the Sikh tradition, hermeneutic theory and its radicalization through deconstruction, Indian philosophy, and the Animal-Human divide. His recent publications include “Ghostly Disorientations: Translating the Adi Granth as the Guru Granth,” “Text as Sword: Sikh Religious Violence Taken for Wonder,” and “Questioning Hermeneutics with Freud: How to Interpret Dreams and Mute-Speech in Sikh Scripture?” and “Cross-Cultural Dialogues with Western Fictions: ‘There is no Hindu nor Muslim’ – nor Sikh.” Bhogal is also active in New York Sikh community activities, including just recently acting as a judge for the Short Film Section of the New York Sikh Film Festival at the Asia Society.

Although I had my reservations, I did not want to prejudge the invitation, even though I found the invitation more than a little perplexing at first because my book RSW presents a trenchant critique of dharma as a Hindu universal, and the way it has been deployed by secular Hindus and the Hindu right to absorb cultural differences of minority traditions.

But I accepted the invitation in the spirit of genuine dialogue and attended one of its post-meeting functions. I found D.A.N.A.M. to be a quite eclectic group of scholars with interests in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions. Some were even practitioners of these traditions. Although I found the adherence by some D.A.N.A.M. scholars and members to the notion of dharma and their corresponding exclusion of Sufism quite problematic, and contrary to my own scholarly position, nevertheless I found it useful to have had an exchange of viewpoints and shared anxieties and understanding about Christian-secular frameworks of the academy.

However, despite my reservations about organization’s agenda and mission statement I persisted.

The following year, at their request, I organized a panel at the D.A.N.A.M. meeting on “Violence and Non-Violence in the Sikh tradition” where several Sikh scholars put forward the position of Sikh sovereignty. This panel was an eye-opener for most of the D.A.N.A.M. group. Many of the scholars in the audience began to realize that they had had a narrow and stereo-typical view of Sikhs and Sikh tradition.

As a result of this engagement, scholars within DANAM began to realize some pitfalls of their concept of dharma and became more open to entertaining criticisms of it. Yet it also became, sadly, clear to me that despite that exchange of ideas between individuals, their organizational structure and mission statement would not be changed – and they would press on with their assimilation of Buddhist, Sikh and Jain notions of dharma.

It then became clear that whilst they may engage in seemingly genuine intellectual debate they had prior and non-negotiable commitments of the dharma traditions model.

Shortly after that, I decided to leave.

Here is the biggest fib by Arvind. The president of the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Foundation, Anaheim, CA had openly sent, several emails-letters requesting the principals of DANAM to desist from co-opting and defining the Sikh Faith as being part of the ‘Hindu Dharma’. Arvind and his brother in arms, namely Balbinder Bhogal of Hofstra University was also asked by SGGSF, to explain why they were on DANAM’s ‘academic advisory board’?

In fact on February 8, 2013, Dr. Jasbir Singh sent an email to both Mandair and Bhogal stating, "Your association with DANAM has deeply hurt the Sikh Community and appears to be a veiled attempt to downgrade the independent identity of Sikh religion as envisioned by Guru Nanak. Being involved in Sikh academic affairs for long time the Community has asked me to write to both of you on this important Academic issue. My request is that you disassociate yourself immediately from DANAM or explain your position in writing or come to the conference in Southern California in May 2013 to present your point of view and explanation for Sikh Sangat and General Public."

Instead of answering SGGSF's polite query or calling him to discuss as any normal person should do, there was dead silence. Suddenly, on February 13, 2013, before 12 PST, both these extremely brave academics removed their names from DANAM's website, without a peep. Immediately thereafter, DANAM's website was temporarily shut down for about week with all content relating to the Sikh Faith being part of the Hindu Dharma removed. So Arvind never left on his own as he claims, instead was caught in his own web and ran when cornered. I challenge Arvind to refute this and prove otherwise. Representatives of SGGSF have always asked the likes of Arvind to come out in the open and have a debate in the public forum so that the public at large knows their real stand and not the convoluted one behind the hallowed yet closed doors of academia.

In order to understand what kind of people Arvind is working with see the following. It is interesting to note that Anju Bhargava (a Brahmin) who studied in Chennai, Tamil Nadu but now lives in New Jersey, a right wing ideologue, closely works with some of the above mentioned Hindu organizations, suddenly injects herself into the email communication (between DANAM and SGGSF) pretending to be mediator in February 2013. Anju's ideology is similar to the DANAM's official Hinduvata definition of the Sikh Faith and its mission statement. She has tried for years to co-opt the Sikhs as a self-appointed leader but has been rebuffed, but she is stubborn and continues to stick her nose where it does not belong. Her emails contain a lot of rhetoric about helping the Sikhs, peace and harmony. Yet there is not a single statement ever from her about the Sikh Genocide or leave alone standing up for any of the hundreds of thousands of human rights violations committed by her Hindu brothers in India against the Sikhs. Arvind and Bhogal cannot be so naïve or ignorant that they do not see through Anju's Brahmanical charade!

*One of Anju's emails stated," **I think mixing Indian politics and Indian government activities with Hindus especially in America is counterproductive. My opinion - In India Hindus are not so empowered. In fact in America Hindus can speak with their own identity in a way they can't in India. I hope the Hindus and Sikhs can build a bridge and reduce this tension. Honestly I was not even aware of the hurt feelings of the Sikhs until this past month. I and our Hindu team tried so hard to work with them. In fact for our August 3rd conference at the White House we brought Valerie Kaur and honored Major Khalsi because we wanted Sikh brethren to know your pain is our pain. Then August 5 th happened and we all became Sikh. Most of the youth there were Hindu and Jain. But Valerie saw them as Sikh and we stood with her at that time. You can read our blog in huffington post.***

Today we are working with homeland security to better self protect ourselves. Personally I and our Hindu team helped the nj homeland security in reaching out to the south Asian community for the past 2 years. Then after August 3rd we focused on the Sikh community and helped strengthen the

gurudwara effort. Now the strategy developed with the Sikh community is shared with Hindu and we welcomed them in the temple on January 26th and learnt from them. No one was disrespectful. In fact we all wanted to help. And are working together to help the poor. After August 3rd shooting all across America temples prayed and reached out to the Sikh community. That is the spirit we should grow and spread. Not the past which is certainly not the future our children see and want.

Can we not better understand and work together and create a dharma identity just like the Abrahamic one? Can we not find common ground? And build our communities in America?"

The above two paragraphs should put in context the empty rhetoric, patronizing and condescending attitude of this woman. She is well aware of the Sikh Genocide and yet claims, "she was not even aware of the hurt feeling of the Sikhs!" Sikhs absolutely do not need any help from the 'caste Hindus' as there are plenty of other well-meaning folks who are willing to stand when the going gets tough. The few hundred million "Dalits" of India are still feeling the intense pain of the all-encompassing Hindu Dharma identity. In fact there is not a single Dalit in any of the Dharma organizations. My humble suggestions is first make amends with the Dalits, then the Muslims and after all of them are given equal treatment, respect and a complete stop to all ethnic and religious pogroms then the Sikhs can maybe consider your proposition. So till then leave the Sikhs alone as we have the strength to manage our own affairs.

DHARMA ACADEMY OF NORTH AMERICA (DANAM) WELCOME

2002, 2003, 2011© Dharma Academy of North America

DANAM Website 'under construction' starting around Feb 13, 2013 after Dr. Rita Sherma agreed to remove any semblance of defining Sikhism (Hindu Dharma style) on their site. First, both Arvind and Balbinder removed their names and thereafter the site was shut down temporarily (for at least a week including the spelling error in the word 'inconvenience').

But I reiterate: holding all Hindus as the enemy is not intellectually respectable. Dialogic engagement, intellectual exchange and discernment are needed, not blanket and polarizing judgment.

Arvind should know better than paint the 'extremely moderate group' - EMG as a Hindu hating group. Nobody hates Hindus or members of any Faith group for that matter. Rather it is the sneaky methods used by Sikh (and non-Sikh) academics which are being questioned as they are sitting on those 'Sikh chairs' which have been raised on the sweat and blood of well-meaning Sikhs, but who have no say at all. Further, the SGGSF has even reached out to the various Hindu and non-Hindu (Jain, Buddhist) scholars who Arvind is referring to, so that there can be an open debate on the issue of the overarching Hindu Dharma co-opting the Sikh Faith, question.

Despite some of the individual scholars, DANAM as an organization has an assimilative core of sanatandharma in a new guise – and it goes without saying that Sikhs simply cannot be part of such a dharma project that excludes by inclusion.

Suddenly Arvind becomes the good guy, [based on the above paragraph] in order to justify why he left DANAM – which in itself is an outright prevarication, as he left only when confronted by SGGSF.

In sum, it is clear that intellectual engagement should remain open-minded, free and critical and that clearly this can happen with any Hindu or Christian or any other group. Whether it can happen with

those groups that on the surface may seem antagonistic to one's position, can sometimes be decided beforehand, but sometimes it cannot. But one must have the freedom to explore.

Again the very smart Arvind should give his detractors some credit – as they are not as naïve as he thinks. He has not done his homework properly, especially if he has not read the works of the people he intends to collaborate with, in the near future. A lot can be uncovered through academic writings to figure out a person's stand, opinions, biases, etc. Arvind is again trying to justify his intellectual engagement with the right wing Hindu scholars, whether DANAM, Uberoi or others, in the name of freedom of exploration. My question is 'at whose expense'? He seems to bite the hand that feeds him. If he wants to be critical of Sikh writings and frolic with the right wing Hindus, he has every right to do so but absolutely not at the expense of the Sikh Chair he is sitting in at the moment. He is welcome to go join a Hindu chair, as they would welcome him with open arms and the Sikhs would see his true colors.

Further he has accepted grants from Uberoi Foundation; to teach kids about the Sikh Faith at his own University. The real question is what exactly, is he teaching when the grant funding his project is 'right wing Hindu money'. I have never seen these Hindus to be so magnanimous, especially when Arvind admits, supposedly realizing now (stated above), "they had prior and non-negotiable commitments of the Dharma tradition model" which actually means that all these organizations are using the exact same premise as "Article 25" in the Indian Constitution which clearly defines the Sikh Faith as part (a sect) of greater Hinduism. If that is not alarming I wonder what is! Arvind cannot be so naïve/ignorant of all this that it took him a few years to figure it out. So I leave it to Sikhs to figure out who is being made a fool.

Generally speaking, of course, it is helpful to engage with Hindu or Buddhist or Christian or atheistic scholars, as long as it helps each group to alleviate misunderstandings and anxieties about the other. But when an organization proves to be resistant to changing its fundamental stance, then dialogue and intellectual exchange become counterproductive.

Really! I would have never guessed! Nice way to clear his own guilt by side stepping all the thorny issues of how and why really he left. If the SGGSF had not done what they did there is a very high likelihood of Arvind and his cohorts (Balbinder Bhogal, Prabsharandeep Sandhu, Gurleen Grewal) would continue (and who knows how many still are) to work with these organisations [Who want to promote the idea within north American scholarship that Sikhism is a minority dharmic tradition without giving any reference from primary source of Sikh studies Sri guru Granth sahib.](#)

Nevertheless, true intellectual engagement and honest encounter is always better than keeping up the pretence of a cold war in which advocates of both communities (polarized through misinformation) throw stones at each other from behind high walls.

The entire proposition of the Sikh chairs in US and Canada has been to do positive research with the propagation of the Sikh Faith and its glorious history through 'Sikh centered books, teaching students at Universities, producing high caliber PhDs who are 'Sikh centered' and conferences'. If anything critical is being produced that simply cannot be produced under any Sikh chair as that is not its purpose. Why on earth would any Faith community waste millions on having their own Faith being critiqued and be put on the defensive by the same individuals who are supposed to be the torchbearers of the Faith. Instead

practically every Sikh chair has had major issues with the chair holder who other than toeing the line of an entity which is mostly inimical to the basic Sikh postulates and/or simply treats it as a nice salaried position which he/she cannot afford to lose, by hook or by crook – and for that reason willing to sell their conscience to the highest bidder.

Academia is not all black and white and especially when comes to social sciences and particularly ‘religious and its subsidiary studies’. When a minority faith group like the Sikhs who have been hounded by a racist government from the other side of the planet, it is never easy for the chair holders to be above all this. Anyone doing research, trying to get their doctorates, continuing post graduate work and holding seminars/conferences are looking for handouts from donors, especially in the field of religion, history, language, anthropology in South Asia. In fact these academics have to dirty their hands again and again, as the two big funding organizations are the ‘American Institute of Indian Studies’ a major funder of many academics in the US and likewise the Shastri Indo Canadian Institute for academics in Canada – both long arms of the Indian government. The gaps in-between are filled by other scheming organizations like Danams, Uberois, etc.

The Sikh public at large is ignorant of the fact that the millions of dollars raised and poured into setting up these chairs have a caveat; which is that the Sikhs themselves have ‘absolutely no say’ in the hiring and firing of the incumbent who gets in the chair. So the fault is really ours that we Sikhs have wasted our hard earned money by setting up these chairs while budding academics with varying agendas/vested interests have sabotaged the primary goals of the funders.

Instead of these Sikh/non-Sikh [anyone working on anything connected to Sikh(i)] academics working towards the genuine positive upliftment of the lofty Sikh traditions while proactively garnering support from the Sikhs in North America so that there is no rancor; most of these characters assume and treat their well-wishers as nincompoops and the minute anyone critiques their shoddy work, some like Arvind lash out by calling them ‘goondas’, the ‘religious police’ and many other choice names. Readers can judge by themselves the credentials of such scholars and their academic work by going to www.globalsikhstudies.net. The Sikh community through tremendous hard work has put their savings, without any strings, into establishing Sikh Study Chairs keeping in mind that they will have a positive impact on North American scholarship about the Sikh Faith. The Sikh community understands the philosophy of the Sikh Faith and does not need any more theoretical or Brahminical explanations.

I close with what Vice-President Al Gore once remarked, “If man’s salary depends on him not understanding something, he will not”!

[The author Arvindpal Singh Mandair is Associate Professor and holder of the Chair in Sikh Studies at the University of Michigan.]

[The rebuttal is by a well-wisher of the Sikh Panth whose reviews are highly appreciated by scholars – Kavneet Singh, Founder, Sikh Education Trust, USA]